Fall 1956

Venture, Autumn 1956

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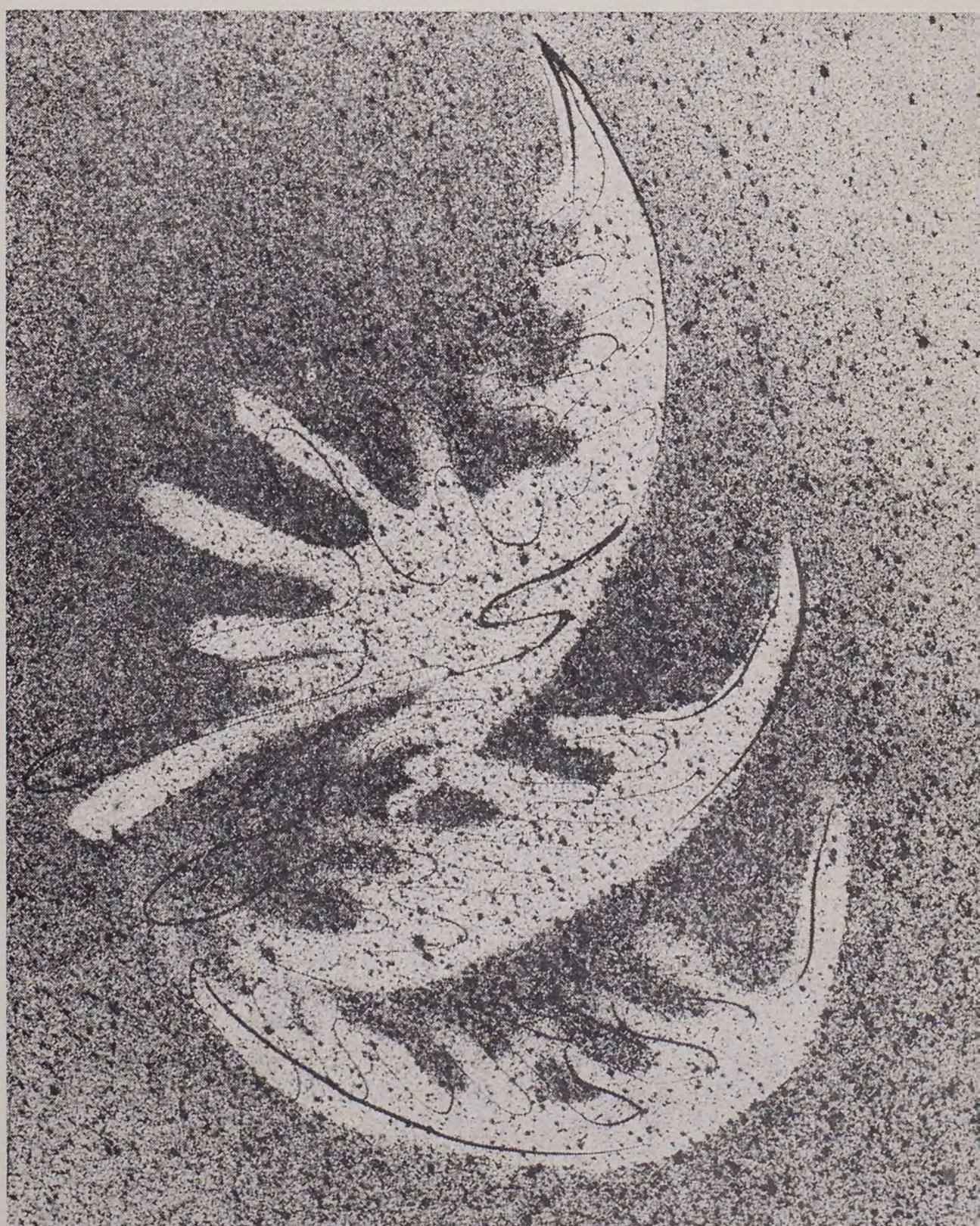
Venture



autumn 1956

VENTURE

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THE PIG'S

BY CYRUS NOE

A graduate student in English, and director of MSU's Radio and Television Center, Cyrus has also been a contributor of poetry to Venture.

FOR MY SON STEPHEN

LATE afternoon, and already the sun of early winter had left only the steep roofs golden. The wagon rolled loud on the shadowy stones, and the boy on the board seat behind the horse traced the rough geometry of the half-timbered walls above him. Each window seemed to hint at twilight life inside, held away from him by patched walls, his longing pulled from window to window with the motion of the wagon down the street into the small square with its church. Boughs of evergreen tied with bright cloth hung above sunken doorways, and now and again he heard holiday laughter ringing muffled in the houses. He could think of Christmas only as a thing to watch, something forever apart from him: a glad time meant for distant hearts, which he would leave behind one by one as the wagon carried him on. He had come this day through trees and mountains, and he remembered with melancholy the forest, gentle hills, and sudden glimpses of joyful water, now going along with him, now going back where he had been. The wagon lurched and complained over rough stones at the entrance of the square. He wondered if his master were awake, the man with the eager, fevered eyes and the great hat that seemed to be a fold of darkness from the security of which his master's mad eyes spied on the world.

THE boy stopped the wagon at a margin of the square in a faint prospect of sunlight from an abutting street. He climbed down from the wagon, which in the sunlight was bright as the stomach of a fired stove, but which had no magic for him who knew its texture and the dullness of its secret. He imagined his master asleep inside, who had once seemed so beautiful, his face flabby and decaying in repose, his keen worldmask put aside for sleep. The shining black wig would be laid on a shelf, leaving exposed the thin strands of dirty white hair on the sleeping head. His master had become a person with whom nothing pleasant or even indifferent was possible, once he had seen behind his master's secret.

Nearest him was a window of bread, there shoes, farther on cakes, and across a corner of the square a shop full of Christmas things. They all shone with expectation through their green decoration, concentrated on the joyous times ahead. Facing him across the square, the church sat silently in its stones, as though it were waiting for something. With the wagon at his back, it seemed in the instant a refuge to him, a place apart from his master and his shabby secret: built eternally of stone, the treasure above all, an object not merely for admiration, but for love. Three very old ladies, all black and white with big red caps, walked slowly into the square along the flank of the church, and entered one of its doors. But nothing changed, and the boy turned heavily to the wagon, where his master waited the pulling of a latchstring. He mounted a small step and pulled. Inside, he saw the man still slept, but in an instant his wary eyes had opened.

"My good sir," the boy began.

"We are here then? We have come so quick? Is there much light left in the day?" The boy heard the thick tones of the awakened marshalled into his master's exaggerated public voice.

CHRISTMAS

"Not much light, my good sir, though some."

"We have not hurried then, my young man," the voice said, now fully sharp. "We have let the reins lie loose in our hands and have forgotten the whip." The boy thought of the horse, to whom even the rest at the end

of the journey must have been painful. The scolding did not move him except to irritation, for it was all the same whatever his master said to him in praise or blame.

HE heard the man putting on his wig, cloak, and hat, assembling himself. "If you please, my good sir, I should like to enter the church across the square and say a prayer." He hardly knew what he had said until the sound of the words had died. Villagers had stopped by the wagon, and his master saw them. "I shall feed the horse first, if you will."

"Of course, my son," his master said, his eyes on the villagers over his cloaked shoulder as he climbed from the wagon. "The young must never neglect their duty to God and the church. I shall join you later." His eyes played over the villagers like familiar hands. "Here is a copper for a candle." His master placed a coin in his hand, but his master's quick white fingers took it away in the same motion, invisible to the onlookers. The boy closed his hand on nothing, which seemed more precious in that moment than any money, for this was the price of getting away from the wagon. "God greet you, honorable friends," he heard his master saying as he walked along the square.

The village was on a hillside, and the square partly conformed to it. He could see, at the bottom of the square through a narrow street above which timbered houses leaned out of perpendicular, a little lake dark with the evening's color. He did not cross the square straight, but walked along its perimiter.

"God greet you, my friend." He was looking at the church, and thought for a moment that the greeting had been meant for him. He looked aside and saw a round, glowing face inside a brown hood, but the frair was not speaking to him.

"God greet you, blessed brother," a voice in a doorway replied reverently.

"May the blessings of God be upon you in this holy season," the friar said. His voice

sounded huge and musical, like the ringing of bells.

"Many thanks to you, my good sir," came the answer.

"Have you yet our feast ready, dear friend?"

"Oh, indeed!" The boy saw a big, black-aproned man step from the doorway. "I shall bring it." He stepped back into the doorway and out again. The dressed carcass of a pig was on his shoulder.

"Ah, my friend, beautiful!" the friar beamed. His round face glowed brighter, and he moved his tongue over his lips.

"Shall I carry it for you, most beloved brother?" asked the big black man.

"Ah no, dear friend," the friar said. He took a cloth from the folds of his habit, and placed the cloth on his shoulder. "I have a cloth to protect my robe, and the strength of God in my shoulder for this happy time." The friar swung the pig to his shoulder easily and held it lightly with one hand. The boy admired the friar's great strength and glowing face.

"It will be happy Christmas for you then, dear brother," said the black man. He bobbed and almost bowed before the happy friar, who carried the pig on his shoulder like a child.

"And for you, and all of us, dear friend." He smiled and his eyes became brighter. "Except for the pig," he laughed, "for this is not to be the pig's Christmas!" The black man joined the friar in his merriment, and the boy, gazing up at the magnificient man of God, smiled his laughter.

"Until I see you again, good friend," the friar said as he turned away. Then a boy about the other's age came out from a passageway and spoke to the brother.

"Most holy and reverend sir," the boy began in a high-pitched voice, "can you find something for a poor boy in this blessed season?" It sounded as though he had been taught the speech by an older person or had learned it listening to professional beggars. The young man from the wagon made a face of displeasure at the scene.

THE brother was displeased too. "For shame, you rascal, to beg in the streets in this season. If you were not remiss in your duties to God, you should not have to beg in the streets, and of a man of God at that." With the pig on his shoulder, its front and hind legs stretched out like a supplicant upon a holy floor, he leaned toward the young beggar. His round face was the soft, creamy color of the pig's flank. "No, young wretch, you shall not tempt my charity here. You know you will be able to get a bowl of gruel on Christmas morning, soup on Christmas night, and a cake at the Christmas pageant. Come to our kitchen in your time, but beg not so shamefully here!" and with his free hand he pushed the young beggar along the street.

The boy looked at the beggar disdainfully. He admired the friar's glowing face and stern manner. How righteous and handsome he was compared to his master, he thought. The boy followed the friar unconsciously along the square, holding his head high as he passed the scorned beggar. He thought perhaps after his prayer he might go to the friar and offer himself into his service, to share the pious and cheerful life of this wonderful man.

THROUGH the door, he knelt and crossed himself. Far off he saw a blaze of candles and gold, toward which he turned his face as he walked and knelt again, his hands closing upon a bar of wood worn smooth with pious hands. The gold made him think of the golden city they had passed through, the lure of which had drawn him to his master. It was huge, past his mind's power to imagine it, a city of dreams that seemed quite equally beautiful and terrible. "The golden city," he murmured, as though he were praying to his dream of it. He put his head on his hands and closed his eyes. It was not a picture of the golden city that came to him, but a vision of the evergreen boughs tied with bright cloth. "It is the season of Christmas," he said half aloud. "How shall I know it?" He remembered the friar then, and thought that it would be more delightful to follow him than to live in the golden city. "I shall find Christmas wherever he is. Here in the church with its candles and altar. Perhaps he will sing here, and I shall stand in the apse and listen!" He opened his eyes and stared in ecstasy at the altar, then closed them happily.

"Are you not going to the lake?" The voice seemed very close to his head, and he started.

In the gloom he saw what appeared to be a boy like himself.

"The lake?"

"Of course, the lake. To see them get up the Christmas pageant."

"Can we go now?" He remembered the lake at the foot of the narrow street.

THE other rose and he followed, through the church, past the altar, out another door. In the street he could see his new friend as they hurried downhill. He was a plain fellow of his same age in a frayed cloak and tunic. The boy was disturbed to notice that his friend looked like the young beggar the friar had scolded in the square. But he could not be sure, and moreover it seemed to make very little difference to him then who his new friend was, so long had he been without one.

"Hurry on," the friend said, "we shall miss all the talking and excitement. I was late last year for just such a reason as this."

They burst out of the street and across a small bridge under which water whispered up at them. "I don't know," the boy began.

"You're an outlander," his friend said. "Didn't I say I was late last year for just such a reason as this? They are along the road here, behind the big trees, in the grotto." He could think of nothing to say, so he hurried along and kept his attention toward the trees ahead.

Once through them, he saw a crowd of villagers and animals milling around a grotto in the face of a cliff, separated from the lake by a square paved with stone. "There," his friend said in haste, taking the other's arm, "will be the stable, the little Christ in the box in the middle; in back for the loving animals, left," he waved with his free arm, "where the shepherds come, and right," another and opposite wave, "where the wise men kneel."

"Sit here," he ordered, and they sat on the stones. The boy looked at his new friend in some bewilderment. The friend's face was without much expression, but his voice was alive with information. "It's the birth of Christ, of course," the friend said, looking at the boy as though that point might not be clear. "People take the parts of Mary and Joseph and the rest, while the animals are in the manger. They are making the grotto into the stable." The boy followed the work of the busy crowd, animals and people, carrying and arranging.

"A MAN who is dressed up to look like an angel stands right here in front," the friend leaped up and put his foot against a stone, "and tells the story. Reads it, I mean."

"What happens then?" the boy asked. The other sat down and took his arm again.

"Well, everybody's got a torch, so when the man is through reading, the girl who is Mary takes the little Christ . . ." he stopped. "It's not real, of course," he said with emphasis. "Just a doll they keep in the church all year." The boy nodded his understanding.

"She carries the doll and Joseph follows, then the angel, then the shepherds, then the wise men, and last the boy who stands on top of the cliff with the big torch and is the star."

He broke off again. "Dear God, there he is, the burgomaster." The boy did not see why the burgomaster was such a startling presence, but he looked.

The person did not appear extraordinary except for his fine white collar and cuffs. His face was round and rather flat. He was talking very carefully to an ox. The boy heard him say, "We do not have room for everyone on that side," indicating the left side of the grotto where sheep were spreading hay with their hooves on the floor of a pen.

"Now know you, it has been customary to have but one ox in the stable. But if you will, we shall have two, and your friend may stand on the other side." The ox thanked him, after which the burgomaster wrapped himself in his lordly smile, quite apart from those working around him, seeming to wait to be approached again.

"He leads the singing. He doesn't sing the best, but he has a loud voice and is the burgomaster, after all."

"When does the celebration come?" the boy asked.

"I knew you would ask that, because that is the important part. It comes when the first snow falls. It's been that way maybe for one thousand years, maybe for two thousand," without pausing for breath. "There are watchers day and night, and no matter when the snow comes, they ring the bell in the tower across the lake." He turned and pointed, "There, and the people and animals come out with torches. Almost always the snow comes at night."

HIS friend finally needed breath, though his face stayed impassive. When he had breathed for just a moment or so, "Look!" he said and pointed across the square of stones, then pounding his fist down beside himself, "Look at him if you will!"

"Who?" the boy asked, uncertain about the other's anger.

"That one there, lying around while everyone works. He's the one who watches in the belltower at night, just because his mother is rich. He sits around all the time now just because he watches. He's too good now for anything else, and he probably will think soon he's too fine to watch."

The object of this impeachment was a young man some years older, who sat with his back leaned on a rock, tolerating the work around him. Another youth of the same conformity came to him, whispered something in his ear. He got up and the two left together. "They're going," the boy said to his friend.

"To the village and mischief, probably. So they must; it must be so." The boy felt he should find something behind that remark, but he could not and gave up trying on the instant.

The crowd of people and animals danced on, but before many minutes it looked as though the stable was completed. "They're just about done, but we missed picking the parts. The year before last I was here for that, but last year, as I told you . . . wait a minute. What's the burgomaster saying?"

The burgomaster had ended his lofty waiting and was talking to some of the workers.

"Very well, we need then only Joseph and a wise man still. When that is done, we need only wait for the snow. Is that not so, my honorable friends?"

AT THAT moment, a pig walked through the group and looked up at the burgomaster.

"That's Francis, or his brother, I don't know which. They're the only pigs left, live at the upper end of the valley almost in the mountains. No, that's not the other one, he's younger. It's Francis. We call him Frank."

"God greet you, honorable sir," the pig said to the burgomaster.

"God greet," returned the burgomaster, rather shortly.

The pig stood quietly and did not speak.

"Is there something?" asked the burgomaster.

"Your servant, sir," said the pig. "I am getting old, as anyone can see, and there on the mountain with my beloved brother, I have been thinking."

This intelligence seemed to irritate the burgomaster. "So?"

"I have watched so many holidays. I'm sure I don't know just how many." He spoke slowly, and the boy could hear every word distinctly.

"Naturally," the burgomaster said. His eyes in his round face blinked nervously, and he fingered one of his white cuffs.

"What does the pig want?" the boy asked, but the other said "Listen!"

The pig looked away toward the mountain. "Servant, sir," he said, "Now, since I am getting old, I should like to take part." The grotto was quiet, but the boy thought he could hear water moving under the bridge across the lake. "In the celebration," the pig said explicity. "Take part in the celebration."

NO one spoke. "I am getting quite old," the pig began, as though he were talking to himself. "There are none of us left except myself and my beloved brother." He looked up at the mountain to illustrate. "I thought this year I should like to take part in the cele-

bration I have watched for these many years, my good sir."

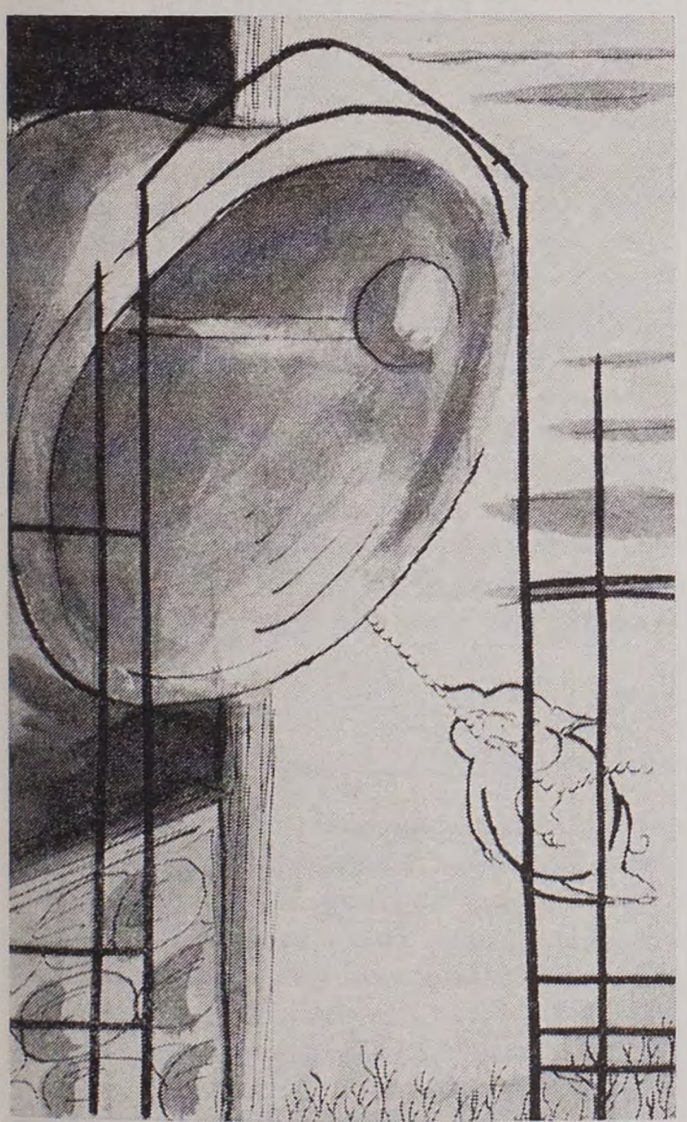
"So it is," said the burgomaster distractedly, "so it is." The boy wished the pig would go away and leave things alone.

"Why don't they chase him . . ." he asked.

"Sshh," his friend said, "this is what we came for."

"What do you mean?" the boy asked, but his friend only shook his head.

"Take part?" the burgomaster said. "I see." His tone was a mixture of coldness and em-



barassment. "But, know you, that is, understand you that there has never been a pig among the animals in the grotto, I will say, in the stable. Besides, this year we have added another ox. So you see, there's no room in the stable."

The pig did not seem disturbed.

"My beloved friend," the pig said, "that is not hard to understand, even for an old one like me. I heard you talking as I came forward, asking your pardon. What I should like has not been spoken for." The grotto was as still as its stones until a sheep coughed. "I thought I should like to take part this year by being Joseph. Saint Joseph. The one who follows the beautiful lady with the Christ."

The boy felt as though someone had struck him savagely, but after an instant, emptied of all feeling. He saw the pig turn and look at members of the group with the placid patience of old age.

THE burgomaster's face became as white as his cuffs and collar, so that he seemed to have an enormous chin that spilled out on his tunic. He turned his back to the pig, and the people and animals followed suit, some of them muttering and looking over their shoulders at the pig, but none spoke out. In their mutual outrage they moved away, leaving him there waiting for an answer. As they left, Frank moved his trotter back and forth in front of him, an action which absorbed his attention. The pig did not look at the boys, but after a few minutes walked off the square and climbed slowly up the valley.

He watched until he heard his friend's voice. "How shall you know Christmas indeed?" He recognized his own thoughts. "How shall you know the pig's Christmas?"

The boy heard a deeper timbre in the voice that had chattered so much before. But his friend's boyish face was the same, without a distinguishing feature and without expression. His attention to his friend's face made him realize then that his friend was the cast-off beggar, and in a sudden welling of anguish which was more painful because he did not know where it came from, he sobbed, and pushed by his unknown sorrow, he turned and followed the pig up the valley.

The hill was a mountain for him. He crawled and panted up its breast, falling many times, but shaking himself and starting on again. When his energy seemed gone, he found the pig on a knoll in a meadow, his beloved brother rolling in the grass nearby. There were a few bones there, and a big bare tree and two smaller ones, but nothing else; he thought that they must sleep under the trees, and that the trees would be very little shelter when the snow came. Night was forming deeper in the west above the cloudy sunset, and in the east there were even stars. Below them, small and indistinct in the powerful twilight, were the grotto and the lake.

I WANTED to take part, after these many years, dear brother," the boy heard Frank say. "I had so wanted to take part; Joseph, standing next to the manger and adoring the Christ child." The brother did not answer. The boy came up and stood near the pig, but the pig did not see him and the boy found he could not speak.

"It will be winter perhaps tonight," Frank said. "I shall perhaps not see the springtime, glorious March and April when the grasses come to life out of the earth. Perhaps I shall have no more of this spring than I had of this Christmas." The boy looked down at the village. He saw a few lights, and was aware that the light from the sun had vanished.

"Perhaps Christmas and the springtime are not for me," the pig said, and the boy felt sad with the pig. "Old and tired," he said so softly that the boy could barely hear the words, but standing there on the knoll the words weighed on him like a huge stone.

"Dear brother," Frank said to him who was rolling in the grass and paying very little attention, "I have never done much of anything, and I am old now."

"What is the celebration about, really?" the brother asked indifferently. The boy wanted to say something but still could not speak.

"About Christ, I suppose," Frank said slowly. "Christ is what the celebration is for, I guess. I don't know much about him, except that he wasn't treated very well. But the torches and singing are for him; it's very lovely, and I like it as well as anything. In the celebration, Christ is a piece of wood that looks like a person and is carried by the girl who is Mary."

THE pig stopped talking, and the boy was startled to be unable to see the village. He knew it must be very late at night, though he did not think he had been on the mountain very long.

It began to snow.

"It will begin tonight without me," Frank said quietly. "Soon the lights will come on and the procession will march around the lake to the grotto. The bell rings to call them out, and as they march the other way back to the village."

"Probably not tonight," said his brother.

"Not tonight?"

Redeem

BY LARRY E. PHILLIPS

I'm such an easily desperate child
When my blood drains down the sewers
With old tree flesh.
But why should I resign?
Why should I drain to a white-skinned life
When I'm green with music in my head?
Then why should I resign
Because October's a desperate month,
Because the winter's white,
And you're white without heat enough
To warm your undershirt?
Should I resign or begin
And not give in to the time?

"While you were down there," the brother said, "I saw a red wagon with the young night watcher and one of his friends going out of the valley. There was a man with a big black hat talking and waving his hands."

"I don't hear the bell," Frank said. "It should be ringing." The boy strained to listen. A minute passed.

"I am afraid you are right, beloved brother," the pig said. The boy heard the pig move in the dark. "I am old, and tonight, too old for another Christmas." Before the boy knew what had happened, the pig had started to run down the hill in the dark.

(Continued on page 31)

The Time

If thought is an action thought,
Then contemplation withdrawn
Or taught is something done;
But a thought unspoken
Is a thought unheard;
If the tree didn't fall,
And there's no one to hear
A sound that isn't there,
Is there anything at all
In the unspoken, unheard thought?

Should I begin or resign
To contemplate a wisdom
Which contracts to nothingness?
If there's nothing in death but death
Should I resign to death,
When the contemplated wisdom of death
Is understood thought?
Or should I begin to speak
An image of thought, a spoken,
Heard and a seen thought,
With the warmth of green, which being
Itself a living thing, lives
And does not contemplate
Itself into sterility or death?

If death is why we live,
Then life for a death-white thought
Is world suicide
By singleness of thought.
But if life is life
For life alone,
Should I begin?
Is it such a desperate thing to begin,
A resigned thing as a dead thing
To begin again;
Which is closer to the end?

A genesis in me,
I will begin.
I will sin in my age's sin,
And love and hate the age I'm in,
Until unnatural things strike me down,
And I go down having loved
Hated, sinned, but felt
And laughed—
Might I laugh?

Might I laugh when all my age
Is such a shallow thought,
And I'm shallow and the people shallow?
Will their tower stand,
Or on its stubble
Will their god fall?
Will my God fall
Or vanish with nothing under Him?

Might I laugh when I can see
Such a monumented heap of dust,
So desperately held by millions of hands,
Leaning, cracked by men like me?
Though only a human god that's dead,
Must they be resigned to such a fall?

Might I laugh in all this rubble,
Among these ruined and jagged stones?
Must such a beginning end
With crushed bodies strewn between the stones?
Must I end just begun,
And might I laugh?
But by green sings,
And these stones tremble under it!
My green starts and these hands wrench free!
Joy swells the green and it laughs
The joyous laugh of life in growth.

Begin and grow again!
Each time the gods fall,
And the white dust settles on the ruin,
The green sings between the stones,
Unchanged and untouched
By the fall of the stones.
The green laughs and weeps but lives
To build and grow two Gods again.
How could I resign?

Happy Are The Ignorant

BY ROBERT FLEMING

Robert Fleming, married and a World War II veteran, is now a sophomore in Foreign Language. This is his first contribution to Venture.

IN 1950, things were for me quite uncomplicated. I believed in a God, in my work, in myself, and in my ability to cope with the future. I had been, I felt, moderately successful. I was twenty-one years old, a sergeant with five years service and stanine scores that would allow me to apply for any type of special training that I felt I wanted. I had concrete plans. I would, sometime in the future, apply for acceptance to Officers' Candidate School or, perhaps, Pilot Training. These plans were always there when I needed them, but were not pressing. They could always be drawn on when I was moved to think of my future, yet did not complicate or interfere with the business of simple existence. I was very content in 1950.

I enjoyed good friends, beer, and boxing, women and an occasional movie. I hadn't finished high school, but that had never hindered me in any way. If anything, I believe I harbored a strong resentment against "these smart college kids." They try to impress you with their knowledge and speak vaguely of Kant, Spinoza, Socrates, Nietzsche, and Sophocles, but don't have an ounce of practical ability or common sense.

THEN I was taken out of my comfortable, sensible berth. My military record said I had studied Latin and French in high school and that I had passed a proficiency test in German, and this, I was told, constituted a "language background." I was to be sent to the Presidio of Monterey in California to study Russian. I didn't feel that my meager training in high school Latin and French and my ungrammatical German picked up through the media of candy and cigarettes after the last big argument in Europe constituted a "language background," yet I did not imagine for a moment that I would have any difficulty in this new field of endeavor. My only serious reservation concerning the assignment was that I would be thrown in with a group of 150 college trained men. I'd have to forsake the company of "real people" for an entire year and live, eat, sleep, and study with idealistic, conceited pseudo-intellectuals. I'd have to put up with the name dropping, the high-planed but empty conversation that was intended only to establish that the speaker had a university background, and the conformism to non-conformism that set these "special" people apart from the less well endowed, very mundane people like myself. I'd miss the down-to-earth, friendly conversation I so much enjoyed with my beer, but a year is, after all, not an eternity, and I'd have as little to do with these people as possible.

The year was still quite young when I realized that these people, too, liked beer and scotch, women, boxing, baseball, the theater, and down-to-earth conversation. I did discover among them the man I once considered to be typical of this group, but found that he was as much at odds with the main as I once was certain that I would be. By and large these people had fewer answers than I and my friends of old had, but they sought answers to more questions than we had ever considered. I cautiously learned to know them and discovered that they were real.

There was Klaus Pringsheim, whose uncle's name was Thomas Mann, who often said

(Continued on page 30)

Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep

BY RALPH YALKOVSKY

I WAS leaning against the end of the bar when these two fellows came up to me. One of them had a great bull neck and it kind of fascinated me.

"You deaf or something," he said.

I guess he asked me something, but I just kept watching his neck getting redder and redder. Kind of interesting watching it change color like that.

"Wise guy," he said.

Ralph Yalkovsky comes from Chicago and is now a full-time instructor in MSU's School of Geology. He is presently studying creative writing under Robert O. Bowen.

The next thing I knew I was on the floor. My lip felt like a squashed banana where it squeezed up against my nose. I could taste the blood as it trickled down my throat.

Then the other guy, he was a little guy, held my arms while Bull Neck worked me over.

"Get him outa here," the bartender said. "I don't want him bleeding all over the damn floor."

BUT they just dropped me down and I just stayed there for a while in a semi-daze.

I walked down Clark street looking for a hotel to kind of rest up in, swallowing my upper lip all the time so it wouldn't show so much.

I went into the lobby of the New Ritz Hotel, which is a strictly crummy hotel, trying to cover my mouth with my hand.

"Like to rent a room," I said. But I guess the clerk didn't hear me too good with my hand over my mouth. And it took me a long time to say it. I know it did because the clerk got kind of bored listening to me.

He was a skinny old geezer and he had a green eyeshade on his head.

He just leered at me.

"We're full up," he said.

Lying bastard.

Every time I swallowed, I could taste the blood as it trickled down my throat.

I went into the men's room and sat down on the can for a while, waiting for my head to clear. There were some cockroaches running up and down along the door, and it kind of fascinated me watching them like that. Running up and down friendly like. I grabbed one of them, and I was gonna crush him between my fingers, but the other one looked so damn lonely, I couldn't squeeze, though I tried real hard.

Then I dropped him down the can. And I

watched him swim around—making funny little circles as he swam.

HE seemed like such a sorry little fellow thrashing around with his feet like that; it made me kinda want to laugh. But there he was trapped in a little whirl pool and he couldn't escape. He couldn't escape. And then I couldn't stand it any longer, so I flushed him down the drain.

My legs felt like rubber bands and I began to sweat. I needed a fix. Damn, I needed a fix. I had enough for just one more in my room and a brand new needle like the doctor's use. I don't like sticking dirty, rusty, old safety pins into my arm.

I reached into my pocket to get my wallet so I could show the cab driver where I lived, in case I didn't feel like talking. But it wasn't there. I looked around the floor, but it wasn't there. And I guess old Bull Neck got it, or maybe the bartender, or maybe old Eyeshade out in the lobby. And I kept thinking, I better get outa there before old Eyeshade came in and got me.

I thought about it for a while, and then I made it out to the street. How, I'll never know.

I walked around under the El tracks, and every step I took it felt as though I had quicksand under my shoes. I tried to shake it off, but it wouldn't shake. Funny that they'd have quicksand on a city street.

I kept rocking back and forth like a man praying. Sweating like a bastard all the time. Holding my one hand over my lip, and wiping the sweat off my head with the other.

A LITTLE old lady came walking up the street with a big black pocketbook under her arm. She smiled at me rocking back and forth like that. A real friendly smile, it seemed, in the light of the street lamp.

I got one foot outa the quicksand, and I tripped her as she passed. She hit her head against the curb as she fell. She moaned for a while. Then she rolled into the gutter.

She lay face down in the gutter, breathing so nice and easy. I took some money outa her purse and watched her breathing there for a while.

Then the quicksand was gone, and I beat it up the street. I almost made it to the corner when I got caught in the quicksand again.

I was rocking back and forth when this cab came by.

"Are you sick, bud?" the driver asked. Real friendly like.

I nodded my head and he helped me in the cab.

We drove down the street past an old lady lying in the gutter.

"Ain't it a shame the way some old ladies drink," the driver said.

I thought so too, but I didn't answer.

We kept driving along, and I kept getting the shakes and sweating.

He helped me to my room and I started to fix the stuff. But I was shaking so hard, I couldn't get it in at first.

I kept thinking about the little old lady lying there in the gutter. Breathing so nice and easy, the way old ladies do when they're lying in the gutter. I wondered if he'd thrash around so funny if he got caught in the quicksand like I did.

I LAID down on the bed, with my hands under my head, waiting for the fix to take effect. I closed my eyes real tight to shut the world away.

Damn, I kept thinking as the fix started to take effect, what a hell of a way to live.

[The End]

THE ONE WITH BOTH EYES SHUT IS ME

BY ALAN GODDARD

THE tired day was upon me. It always is when I get no sleep at night, and that night I got no sleep, just my roommate's tape recorder droning his French vocabulary into our ears. Test, he explained, I learned while asleep. Anyway, when the gang came in to get me up—normally it takes four of them—they did not expect me to be crafty. Up, up, they shouted and laughed. I ignored them. Aren't you getting up and going to class, my roommate asked. Are you, I said. Yes, he said. Fifty per cent is pretty good for this room, I chucklingly answered. They threatened me with the cold tub.

I'm up, I'm up, I yelled, springing to my feet forcing those tired slits called eyes wide. I just don't sparkle, I said. Sparkle, hell, replied the organized enemies of soma. Excuse me, I said and went and hid in the john. The place was cold and I longed for my bed about me. I stood there shivering behind the shower curtain, certain that I had outwitted them. Perhaps I was exhausted; I don't know. A hand shot by, the faucet was turned on. I just stood there damning them. Really wet.

Back in the room, I leered at the mirror and said, I don't know who you are but I'll brush your teeth. They all got hysterical when I smeared the toothpaste on the mirror. See, I sparkle now. I said, you can go away. I'm up. Really awake. Good day to get things done. Heh, heh.

They weren't having any. They just sat there and watched my every move like a bunch of hungry cocker spaniels. Nobody ever saw so many sad, hungry brown eyes in a row before.

Alan, who recently returned to MSU after half a year in New York City where he studied playwriting at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, is a senior majoring in English.

AT breakfast they forced an egg at me. I hate breakfast. I loathe eggs. They turn my stomach—just staring at the congealed glass-eyed yolk and the cold grease of the white. It takes at least five cigarettes and much coffee to cushion my stomach for that sticky shroud covering my toast. Anyway, I twisted my face into what I imagined was an enthusiastic face, looked and cut into it. Life seeped from it. Nearly gagging, I reached for my coffee and smiled through shaking and watering eyes. I think they expected me to make conversation. The hell with you I said. They smiled and patted my head. If there's one thing that disgusts me nearly as much as eggs it's acting cute at breakfast. Anyway I told them to go to hell because in my persecuted, tired way I hated them, and my hatred made

me arrogant. I looked out the window. Ooh, snow, I said.

Yeah, winter is here said my roommate. A real bright conversationalist my roommate. Just bright and at 7:30 too.

Look, I said, all the soft, warm furry things are sleeping, hibernating, and I want to too. Sleep, I mean.

The cocker eyes again. I felt I should offer them my leftover except that my egg was studded with cigarette butts. That cold air will shock life into you, Jerry said.

Big mouth I muttered. Then I bemoaned the lack of any real friends, and complained that I was surrounded by cold handed assassins. I put my last cigarette out and bustled into my coat.

Ready to face the world on another day, my housekeeper said.

I restrained myself. One does not kick sweet, old ladies in the stomach. But I could have; the thought was there.

HISTORY was a bore. Gigantic. All that trouble in England. I fought, really I fought sleep. I doodled, wrote letters home. Dear Mom, Just have a minute and thought I'd dash off a line. How are you? I'm fine, got over that cold. And overdrawn. How's Dad, the dog? What do you hear from Henry? Things are going well! Love, and so on. I tried bewilderedly to place a question mark. Then I looked at the reflection of my eye in the glasses. My eyelid quivered, red rimmed and sickening. I was watching myself go to sleep. Out of sheer desperation I lit a cigarette in an effort to stay awake. A Theta in front of me gasped at my audacious immorality. I stuck my tongue out amiably at her. Snake, I thought.

My pencil trailed down my notebook, across the desk and into my lap. I bolted upright, eyes open staring at the teacher. The clod next to me laughed. He was of an obvious Jukes-like strain. I forgive you, I said. For what, he asked. But I was asleep, maybe even snoring. I didn't care. Someone finally shook my shoulder. It was two o'clock. They had let me sleep through my nine, my ten, lunch and—Aw nuts, I said and went home to my room. I got undressed. My one consolation was the fact my roommate had flunked his French test. I knew I'd smile in my sleep.

[The End]

as the leaf...

Sweet ripples kiss a mosslipped shore,
That but a falling leaf could wake,
And true those dying tremors are
The last that leaf shall ever make,
'Till the sad so certain sinking
Steals it from a surface still.
God! Teach me of the leaves and men
And how your purpose they fulfill.
I feel adrift upon a lake,
Cradled in the breast of earth,
And some helpless, stirring fight,
Seems all to me that I am worth.
In His name I tremble now,
But forgiveness makes me think
Of that day when I will kiss Him
Once, just once, before I sink.

BY PETE LARGE

A freshman in English, Pete is from Billings, Mont. He attended Pillsbury Academy where he was Cadet Commander.

VALLEY OF SHADOW

BY DAVE WALKER

Valley of Shadow marks the debut of Dave in Venture. A graduate assistant in English, he plans to get his M.A. in June.

HE stepped inside the door, shivering slightly, in spite of the heat outside. Resettling his collar on his shoulders and smoothing his suit-coat to his sides, he felt he looked like a hesitant shadow expecting to be swept away any moment. But he remained, peering through smoke and artificial shadows that found opposition in the dull luster of black-enameled table-tops and white-lighted moon-faces. The neon blur above the back passageways filtered through swirls of yeasty air, glancing off the moist film of sardonic eyes, fleetingly curious. They told him they knew he had not expected to find anyone; but he continued the pretense of searching.

His glance enfolded a group of laughing people at the end of the bar. He moved toward them, but his attention was drawn by his own image approaching him from the rear of the room in a large mirror set between two candle-lights. He studied it. James Huxley: medium and different as everyone is medium and different; face a little puffed and brooding, not interestingly sulky, definitely not haughty; like it had blown itself up with the heat of unexpressed thoughts and then had sagged to its present shape. His eyes particularly gave this impression, he thought. They were wide and slightly red-rimmed. He half expected tears—or smoke even—to spiral from them. But they were empty.

JAMES turned away from his reflection and slid gently onto a bar stool close to the laughing group. The bartender, examining the devil's-point of his hairline, took his order. When the hand reached for his change, James held his own over it until the man's inward-drawn eyes focused on his own. Then, he uncovered the money. The bartender shrugged and took it, snorting slightly as he walked to the cash register.

James looked back through the windows into the street. It was that time of evening just before sunset when glass becomes a myopically staring prism, collecting dull, blank light. He had felt compelled to shatter its opaque blandness, like a child thrusting a stick into still water. It had been the bleating, thrusting sound of a stripped car gear, searching for contact, that had forced him through the bar door.

He hugged the solid, damp glass with his hands and looked around him. The light that had filtered into the interior accentuated the moonglow pallidness of faces, separating everyone into patches of shadow, intermittently broken by planes of dusty yellow.

A COUPLE beside him were intensely occupied in conversation. At least the man was intense. His eyes pleaded for understanding as they begged for fusion. The girl, though, protected her solidity with a thin eye-film and a perpendicular thought. The man—hurt

—retreated, awed and impotent, hating idea. He struck out at smugness.

"And you think you surrendered too much; you gave in too often. There you sit in your poised self-sufficiency looking like a serene fanatic after conversion and tell me blandly that it's all over."

His tone became sneering.

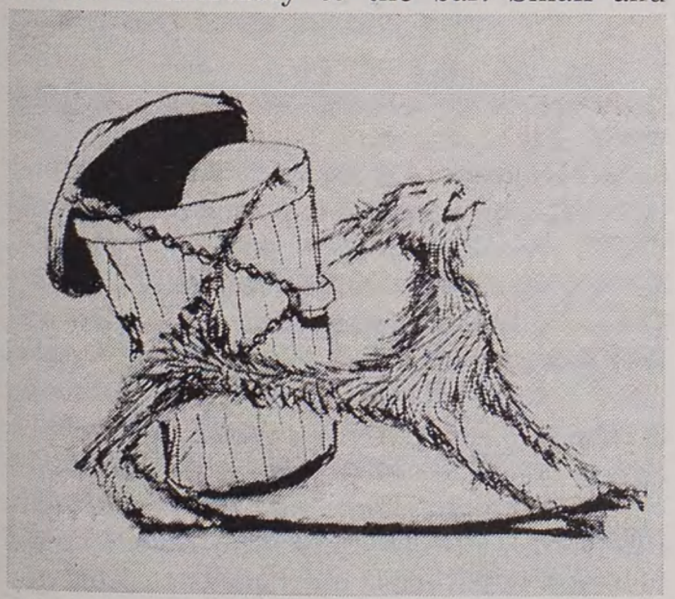
"You've been thinking. You have an idea in your head that doesn't run parallel to mine; so that cancels out love. Like that!"

He drained his glass, looked at her savagely, said, "OK, go float on your thought-cloud!" and left.

Coolly, she picked up her purse, forebearing and proud, and walked toward the rear exit.

A hand tapped James on the elbow.

"Pardon me," its owner said, "I thought for a moment I knew you and I didn't want to pass without greeting. Mistake." But his hand shifted comfortably to the bar. Small and



doughy—perspiring, the man smoothed his tie and laughed a tight, little laugh.

"Beautiful evening, isn't it? It's good to be alive in weather like this. I often stop of an evening before going home. My wife gets upset. Says I'm a regular drunkard. Heh."

CAUGHT, James nodded sympathetically. Then for some reason, an involuntary response to an unexpressed expectation, replied, "Regular bounder, eh?"

The man beamed, added a wink of understanding that seemed to say, "Between us men", and plumped down beside him.

He saw it coming. Frustrated childhood, memories of interest only to a psychiatrist or a friend; the doughy little man would buy drinks and assume he had gained both; the chubby hand folding and creasing a bill; the faint, initial fire of self-consuming thought finally fizzling into a look of expectancy; James would return the favors with one final drink and move on.

He sat back and nodded, amazed that the other could not discern the inversion in his eyes.

Beyond him, beyond their reflections in the bar mirror, James saw two friends gesticulating, earnest and table-pounding in their expounding. One was glowing with fervor—aware of his attraction. But beside them, at the next table, sat a figure commanding in its silence. Chin on hand, a cowboy was listening to the organist, seemingly unaware of the din. He was almost a stereotype: Stetson hat, hard jaws accentuated at the moment by swarthy, fine-planed fingers stroking a handle-bar mustache, young still, and separate, seemingly out of his element.

ORDERING the final drink for his fast-fading acquaintance, James left him slumped at the stool and dropped down at an emtpy table near the westerner.

Beyond the Stetson hat, he noticed the two friends jabbing at each other now with claw words, their only weapons against surrender of argument. They had become their ideas. The look of temporary hate that flared behind their eyes, ill-concealed because of the liquid barrier-crushers in their hands, warned of a breach. Both, knowing it was temporarily inevitable, seemed to force it, agonizingly proving to themselves that the other side of the coin was also tails.

The westerner turned to him then, nodded in reference to the arguing pair and said in a tone alien to his appearance and disconcerting in its abruptness, "Long ago, I decided idea was evil. Life is a constant maladjustment to truth, and idea simply mal-adjusts us to ourselves. After all, where does it get us? I think of St. Paul, Mohammed, Joan of Arc, Luther, Nietzsche. Disputes and wars over idea. The man was right. 'War is hell'. And life is war. Life is hell. And yet some people pray for immortality."

HE smiled wryly. "I suppose you're also looking for the man who simply is; no justification necessary; no need to express or proselytize, or expand the ego?"

"Yes, I guess so," James replied. "But I also remember 'Let the dead bury the dead'." He started to leave.

" 'Protect my maleness from the dragonfly of doubt'," the westerner continued sneeringly but with pathos. "The only line of poetry I ever wrote." His tone changed: "And now you're disgusted. I've telescoped an evening's discussion that would have ended the same for us both—in spiritual nausea. A new soul plumbed and found empty." He put his hand on James' shoulder. "Give up the search. There is no natural man. He went out of fashion after Rousseau. We all have to communicate, even if every idea does end in war or a cliche."

"Is it communication or sense of rhythm?" James replied, and he relaxed. The man seemed sympathetic now. James said, "I talk of it blandly now, but . . . I agree. Idea is evil. I've idead myself right out of reality. I'm a gear out of mesh. I no longer know which is real—me or the world—or neither. We both aren't, it seems."

The westerner leaned toward him.

"And in your continued self-contemplation," he said, "you'll also end up without even your own individuality to identify yourself. Your pride will consume your pride."

He puffed a cloud of smoke between them. "That's how you'll soon see yourself," he said indicating the smoke. "It's a stage. I quit the knowledge game long ago and went back to the ranch. Too late, though." He shook his head. "The Paradox. Now I come here gigged up like a cowboy philosopher, trying to look soulful and separate and complete. It works. You came to listen to the cultured cowboy spouting his idea that idea is evil."

"Is that your only reason?" James asked him, watching his face closely.

THE man's hand cupped his jaw. He considered. Then, grinding his cigarette into the ash tray, answered: "No . . . I wrote one other line of poetry once. Simple prayer. 'Lord, let me be loving.' Doesn't often work. Too often a blind duty. Duty is superstition, I think. It's love that is religion. I seldom have that."

He shook his head in bewilderment and continued: "We say: 'The world's not good enough for me; I'll change the world.' We assume we know what God wants and speed up the gears. We bring God down to our level, or we destroy him. He becomes another idea. Or we say: 'I'm not good enough for the world; I'll change me.' Then we accept symbolic mediators. Either way, if we continue to think, we end up with a feeling of unreality."

"But thinking vivifies the world for us." James said, feeling even as he did so how untrue this was for him.

"It does when we don't circumscribe or categorize," the cowboy replied. "We either accept Moses' ten mediators or we adulterate ourselves to the knowledge of Ecclesiastes. But once we're agreeing with Solomon, we don't see much sense in prophets or progress; and a catharsis seems as little good as a commandment. Blind faith or wisdom don't seem enough. I doubt if the faith of an Abraham, say, could move a mountain in the sense of the proverb. Mountains are one of my few realities. There's a mystery there I can't fathom. . ."

He slouched into his chair and drew back into himself.

JAMES nodded, rose, stood for a moment in indecision, looking at the two of them reflected in the mirror, then pushed through the glass door into the street.

He looked at the articulate lights of the town he had just left; and when he closed his eyes slightly their long, fiery lashes shot up

THREE

MOUNTAINS THROUGH A SUNRISE CLOUD

Mountains through a sunrise cloud—
Veiled women, coy, capricious—
Had, as would an ardent mistress,
Taken from him half his life,
Leaving him the only coyote's freedom
And heart that cried for home.
Now distant peaks wore unkept promises
Like unkempt morning scarves of fog,
Cat-grey; but still he smiled
Before their feet, insatiate,
And having loved was not too high a price.

POEMS

BY MOLLY DUFFELL

Molly's three poems introduce her as a talented poetress. She is a graduate assistant in English.

CYNIC'S DIRGE

Blinded by self-ignorance they live
Prodded and spurred by charity, give
Not of themselves, but of what they think right;
Not what they want, but what they think might
Be acceptable in the eyes of their betters
And bound by the chains of their self-forged fetters
They sit disconsolate
And cry aloud
At the cruelties of insurmountable fate,
Which they in ecstasy await
With bared heads bowed.

INSANITY IN BLACK AND WHITE

Nightfall, and a garish gleam from underneath the door
Sweeps crabwise, defiling that black marble
With grime of dirty feet.
Turn round; what is that noise behind
Sounding like creak of war-weary armor in an April rain?
Is that the housemaid, laboring on her arthritis? Hardly;
She's not one for midnight pots of tea.
Why must that light shine? Cannot one pass
Without the leaving of a visible departing path
From foot to foot, the syncopated beat
Of drunken drumming?
I would be quiet. Can't you let me go
Without that grab of mousetrap, foottrap, hangers on
For blood and memory? No, let me go, thou shrill!

to his own and exploded into dots of brilliance that seemed to betoken a warmth he would outdistance if he continued farther. He hesitated. He wasn't sure what had made him leave the bar, walk through the quiet side-streets of the town, along the clipped walks of the park where sprinklers—like waterbugs—tossed water at the shadows then cowered from the dull thuds of their own doing, on past houses, some sleeping, others throbbing with human anger or the drone of human talk, out along the dirt road that snaked up the mountainside—its beaded glimmering burrowing into the forest that hugged the nape of the hill.

In the open like this he found a measure of peace. Above and below and surrounding the forest there were wide stretches of grasslands interspersed with sage brush that soothed him, if they didn't answer the question he brought them. He realized, now, that was why he had come.

THE cool night wind and the damp, hard grass beneath his hand as he eased onto the ground invited him to stretch out. He nosed the fresh sweat of the ground and sank his cheek onto a mound of mossy earth that was still warm from the heat of the day and the energy that lived within it. He ground his hipbones into the softness of the plane and felt the sensuousness of the earth he could never quite separate from the longings in his body. Then he rolled over onto his back—and it was above him! The forest! Inverted, as it seemed to him now, it was more awesome than ever. The mountain had been the cowboy's reality. Here was his.

He didn't want to enter it, and when he looked back at the town below, he didn't want to return. The lights of the town, its reflections, its narrow but uncomplicated streets, its marquees and billboards, its people—all gave easy answers to easy questions. For him the forest never spoke. It was ominous and inscrutable. Flecks of dim moonlight cut arches through its foliage that separated before the light like furry legs of a huge and multi-digital tarantula. A slight breeze shifted the fur of this object, and he could almost hear its slow breathing as it a

lay—a great, black clot just a short distance above him.

He tried to analyze his fear. It was not the inhumanness of the forest he feared. If he could force himself into its depths, it would not be animal life or grotesque plant shadow that would clutch his chest and drive him scrambling back into the open. He guessed it

was the weird, stray human, the legendary madman, the depraved and ousted creature that nature had driven into the town and that society had driven back to the forest that waited behind every tree. Or possibly, it was the fear that he would turn around suddenly and find—not a legendary madman—but himself—breathing down his neck.

He rose to his feet and warily approached it. Its mysterious voice brought back memories he had never had. His back shivered from the touch of monstrous imaginings without shape. He stopped when he reached the first tree. He could force himself no farther.

IT HAD not always been like this . . . In the uncalculating days of childhood when he had run barefoot over these hills, he had often gone into the woods during the day. Even then he had felt a deep mystery about it and he had always expected something. As he grew older, he had gone there consciously and waited and listened; but whatever he expected never came. The forest, for him, became a force, slightly forbidding, that watched. Then in his later teens it had become a place of secret thought. Finally, he was convinced it was the pagan force that draws men backward to elemental evil. He avoided it.

In the company of others he would hunt within the forest—but at these times it gave him no pleasure to pull the trigger. It wasn't fear then either. This was for him the same hesitation he felt before he ripped a slice of bark from a tree. It was a necessary precaution if one did not want to lose one's way out again—just as hunting was necessary if one wanted venison or if one wanted the companionship of the hunt; but he didn't enjoy meeting the forest with arms.

He felt uncomfortable the few times now when he entered it alone. He resented it as much as he feared it. It had become a hostile and unforgiving force—for he could never divest it completely of personality. He got a great deal of satisfaction hiking quickly through it and beyond to the mountain-top where he could look down on it with a definite joyous feeling of mastery. He liked nothing better than to climb the jagged peaks that bordered it, constantly watching it out of the corner of his eye. He always hoped for wind to combat him on these excursions. He would nearly burst with joy as he ploughed through the gale that tore at his eyes.

It had not changed, but he had. It was his reality now, and he had to possess it. He was like a long reed sucked empty—brittle, the juice of life worried away by thought permeated rooms. He looked warily at this unwon friend who had always withdrawn, who now stared back at him blandly. He leaned his face against the lone tree beside him. It was cold and unyielding.

SUDDENLY he was enraged. He grabbed a dry stick and hurled himself into its depths. He ripped at brush, sheering away their leafy tops; he jumped up and dragged limbs to the ground and was furious when they refused to crack. He removed his knife and slashed tree trunks. Finally, in one futile and whimpering thrust, he buried the blade into a pine and sank exhausted to the pine needles.

The pine wind began to sing then and the branches swished hollowly. A pine cone rolled down against his leg and needles brushed his cheek. He felt sensual; and if he could have—in his hurt—he would have ravished the forest.

At this thought, he sat up quickly and stared into the darkness. The rim of the woods, where he could see patches of jade sky sewed against the branches, was some distance off. He held his breath. His jaw seemed frozen and even his eyes were hesitant to arc. He rose to his feet, stiff and hunched. He groped forward, too frightened to look any direction other than toward the jade light. The sounds of the forest multiplied as if his ears had turned up the volume, and they were all unfamiliar. The purring of the spider changed to long, heavy breathing, and the entire forest quivered with the effort.

BEFORE him the forest dropped suddenly where no light seemed to penetrate. A great valley of shadow lay between him and the sky.

"And though I walk through the valley of shadows," he remembered. The cool, sweating church basement where he had learned that Sunday-school lesson pushed back the forest sounds, and he was immediately confident. He felt as he had on the mountain top and on the rocky slide.

But he still felt unreal and dry. He still had to admit that nothing was permanent, that nothing he held to—no idea or person or institution was security against birth and variety. The dry womb still encircled. He was equal to the forest but that was all.

HE stopped. He let his fear rush past him into the sounds of the forest. It worked. It did not return with the sounds. An idea had held them off, but now the mystery and complexity rushed forward again—welcome. For this moment he would not let his mind grapple with them. He sat beside a tree and let the natural darkness soothe him. A small bug crawled upon his hand and he hated to have to remove it from the scratches there. The branches he would soon have to force aside, nodded him to drowsiness. Soon, he dozed.

[The End]

CHILD-CHRISTMAS

BY DOUG GIEBEL

lean cats, leaping,
running over the rubble
at the end of their streets
of gnarled garbage cry (like
the day they took the tired
third avenue el away,
a quiet time)
cry when the man comes
mechanized beyond repair
and empties the contents of
cats hearts desire, drives
away, leaves them
to wait,
    starving for a time
stomachs empty,
until tomorrow.
love, music, cymbal crashes of
tin lids, rain in empty barrels . . .
it's strange, mommie, why
old people fear truth most.

Doug, who is primarily known for his work in dramatics, has also shown talent as a poet with his contributions to Venture last year. Doug is a junior in English.

The Thirty-Ninth Day

BY LARRY E. PHILLIPS

IT WAS the morning of the flood. Noah had readied himself, his family and his ship. Cupriah, a bastard son of someone, left his home on a mountainside where he lived with his wife and two children, to tend to the morning chores. The sky above and around him was dark with clouds, and he could smell the rain in the air as he left the house. It was a strange smell to him, unlike the usual fresh odors which came before the rains; the air lacked its sweetness, and smelled like the fur of a dead goat he had found once, lying in the rain.

Cupriah had not read because where he lived in the mountains, far from a village, there were no books. He and his family told stories of their own making, sitting by the fire during the evenings, huddling close together to save the warmth of each others' bodies. Cupriah was making such a story in his mind as he fed the oats he had reaped during the summer to his goats. When he had finished and had left the fold for his home, it began to rain, the beginning of the rain falling gently, softly tapping at the earth.

When he had entered the house, he had finished making the story, and he found his wife, Derea, standing humped over the stone pot in the fireplace, stirring the soup he would eat for his breakfast. His two children stood beside her, warming themselves because they had just awakened and come from their beds at the far end of the home, where it was cold. Cupriah stepped behind his wife and placed his hand on her shoulder, then moved his hand up until it touched the soft skin on the back of her neck beneath her hair. She tossed her head, then caught his hand between her head and shoulder. His children looked up, the light of the fire in their eyes, and watched their parents affection so easily done.

DEREA set the table, her family sitting down at the table in front of her. She asked her husband if it wasn't too early for the fall rains to begin, and if it was a good rain, a rain good for walking in through the woods. He answered and said it was a strange rain, unlike any rain he had seen before because of the smell it brought down to the earth with it. But he said they would walk after breakfast if she liked, since the harvest time was over, and his work, the hardest work, was over for the winter months.

After breakfast Cupriah offered a reward to his children if they would clear the table and wash the dishes. He said that they could tell their stories before him in the evening, giving them the chance of bettering his tale, if they would do the work he asked of them. Cuprah's children agreed happily and began clearing the table.

Cupriah and Derea left their home for a walk in the rain and woods, the rain falling steadily now, dropping on them in large drops from leaves above them, which had gathered the smaller drops and let them fall. But it was still a gentle rain and wind, the wind blowing the rain against their faces, until their lips were moist and beads stood on their faces. They kissed sometmies when they stopped to smell the air, which smelled strange, or when they paused to watch some small animal burying or digging for something in the earth, soft and wet now under the rain.

THEY walked down the mountainside until they came to a stream, swollen a little, but still clear, the fish in the stream piercing its surface to catch an insect in flight. Beneath a huge tree, still thick with its summer foliage, they sat down to listen to the rain, and the stream flowing down the mountainside, a slight wind stirring in the trees. They did not speak but sat quietly, feeling the rain fall on them, listening to the gentle sounds around them. They were calm and content, needing nothing, wanting nothing, because in them there was no fear of rain, because of home, its warmth and dryness.

The next day the rain had thickened in the sky, large drops breaking through the leaves and smacking the ground, the soaked earth spotted with puddles and muddy little streams which emptied into the larger stream, swelling it, making it muddy and thick. Seven days later the rain fell relentlessly, steadily, the thunder rolling in the mountains, echoing among the mountains. Cupriah's children and his wife were afraid; they had brought dry wood into the house, but it was disappearing. Cupriah wondered how he and his family could stay warm without dry wood.

No one left the house except Cupriah who fed his goats, who were cold and damp, the warmth of their bodies condensing the wet air around them into beads which clung to their fur. Cupriah comforted his family, telling them that the rains would cease, that they could walk in the woods again, and that the woods would be dry. But Cupriah himself was afraid, because during all his life which he had spent in the mountains, there had been no rains like this, none that lasted so long. But the rain did not cease, but fell

day and night, never stopping, never slowing, as if it would fall forever. The wood in their home was gone, and to keep dry and to keep the fire they broke the table and chairs to use for wood. The rain continued, the thunder greater, bellowing among the mountains, and Cupriah and his family were frightened.

ON THE twenty-fifth day Cupriah's goats died because of the dampness which reached to their skins and took their warmth from them. Cupriah took all the wood from their stalls, though it was swelled with the dampness, and put it near the fire in his home to dry. The next day the trees began to slip from their holds on the earth, the water loosening the earth around their roots, until all the earth that had been formed above the bare rock of the mountain had slipped down the mountainside, carrying all the trees and plants with it. Cupriah's home, built on a protruding rock, stood fast among the roaring thunder and rushing water, but all the land around his home was bare.

His children and wife wept at night as they lay together before the fire. He could no longer comfort them.

ON THE thirty-fifth day the fire went out and the house was damp and cold. Cupriah's children grew sick and coughed blood from their lungs. The family did not speak to each other, so great was their fear. They huddled together near where the fire had been, Derea holding her children to her to give them her warmth. The next day and night the children grew weak, and Cupriah knew his children were about to die. Just before the next day, before the gray light came again through the window cuts, Cupriah's and Derea's children died and the smell of their deaths was mingled with the odors of dampness in their home. When the children died, Derea, who was holding them, let them slip from her arms onto the floor. She watched their damp, cold bodies, and as the warmth and life of their bodies left the home, Derea's life began to be pulled from her, and she grew sick. Cupriah begged her to try, not to give up to death, but she answered him by saying that with her children dead and their own deaths coming, there was no reason for her to live. The next day as the dark light filtered through the clouds around the home, Derea was dead.

On the thirty-ninth day Cupriah heard waves rushing against his home, the water breaking through the window-cuts and streaming through the cracks of his home. The water ran to where his wife and children lay, drenching the clothes around their dead bodies. Cupriah, his grief more than his fear, bent over his wife and put his hand on the cold skin of her neck beneath her hair; the touch was cold; her hair was matted and smelled as the fur of his dead goats had smelled.

THE roar of the waves grew louder and their beating stronger, as they thumped against the house. All the earth was a sea. The door broke open, the water flowing in, seeking every corner of Cupriah's home. The water rose to his knees. His home, under the force of the waves, slipped a little down the mountain, its floor resting near the surface of the sea. The water rose to his waist, and the house tottered. Cupriah tried to hold Derea's body above the water. Cupriah's home, slapped by an overwhelming wave, slipped from its foundation and plunged down the mountainside into the water. As the home was swallowed by the water, Cupriah, holding to Derea's body, was above faith and honor. He had no hope for life. And a dove circled once above the home, but flew away because there was no place for it to alight.

[The End]

The Thirty-Ninth Day and Redeem the Time, a poem on page 8, are Larry's contributions to this Venture. His poetry and Mag's Harvest, a story, appeared in last year's magazines. He is working on an M.A. in English.

The Japanese Scroll

Barbara Knight

Winner of two Stearns' short story awards, a graduate assistant in English, and frequent contributor to Venture, Barbara has established herself as one of the Northwest's most promising young writers. Here on these pages are examples of her work.

THE tree had spread itslf across all the windows and, tossing, it sprinkled its leaves along the pane, a tinkling splat almost as of a wetness or raindrops that weren't there. He had slowly, and so carefully, inched himself out the window, down and across the floor, by bits and stopping every moment within a breath, so as never to be discovered.

Once across the wide, tan stretches of board and tile, he hoisted, lifted himself across the sash, depending his body above the floor and sill and holding, hesitating, he watched the leaves, and grass below him. Each blade moved separately, sinuously in the wind, as a river, an ocean of moving, weaving water.

He plunged then, from window case to tree and clasped the thin, swaying limbs of tree in his hands. They moved heavily, the thinner, loose-grown branchlets; twigs jerked, whipped convulsively. He lay supine, his cheek pressed against the rough, tan bark, sensing the knottiness and fiber of the living wood. And he let his hands encircle it and smooth it, following the grain through its fibrous bark.

He lay there, swinging, pushed by the wind, accruing to the tree and he longed to bite it. The early days of young meadows and golden poppy flowers running forever in the sun, came back unbidden. And the trees that swished in other winds. He would peel their bark away, baring the stripped white sweetness of the fresh, green wood. Then he would suck and chew the ends and lay the tips against his tongue to make it salt of sweet.

Now, he bit, and harsh and dusty, the wood unyielded. He spat and clung more closely to his perch.

THE rustle and tickle of the higher leaves stroked his hair, enticing and luring him further into the depths of the tree; he crawled, climbing and panting toward the top and the short puffs of breathing wind caressed his neck until the curls and whorls rose tingling, sensual in the afternoon.

At last, as he crept to the summit, cosy and warm, flushed with sun, surrounded, em-

braced by such blues of autumn sky and feeling the sound and strike of gold, red, and over over, the green, green grass and leaves, he knelt.

The peans ceased before begun, and mumbled, incoherent outpourings fell soundlessly in air never still with wind, the rustle and tipping of the leaves.

And now, as he crouched on the furthermost leaf-ends, he pressed his ear to the slick, padded softness of the leaf and, listening, could even hear the running in the veins he sought. And as he curled there, soaking the air, its currents wrapped him round with soft, wet lickings and he became, a leaf.

THE first thing Evan encountered in Dragoo, was the absolute lack of kindred to his flexible and shifting-focused soul. He went first to the game house, and then to the card house and even, militantly, to the floating grog shop operated by Christopher Wherry.

And entering, he said, "Good morrow, sir. Might I buy a bit from you?"

As Mr. Wherry was irascible and hard put to it for reply in any likely tongue, he said, "Buy you for the soul or health, young gentleman?"

"Oh, for the soul assuredly. My gods, sir, the health is secondary only!"

In this way was built the likable and oftentimes, abashed, friendship of the two. So unlike in kindred but so dedicated in demands of human weariness and grief. Their fellows said, of course, "Mark you, they ride a single horse, but ride it back to back!"

Now, as the days were drawing on, and, easy as the living was, no man could walk forever on his lone, pragmatic plane, and like young men of ancient and of modern times, young Evan fell in love.

She lilted, through the fields and walks, she lilted. And light as butterflies and pretty, green and yellow stars, in the heat of spring-seared passions, she fell in love.

AS seeking mutual bondage in a culmination brooked with snares and shabby, littered trails, they merged.

Oh, ecstasy—the days bloomed long and hot and waxy blossoms cascaded toward the earth, releasing pelting vapors, scents of rose and mist-tinged bowers in early, cool and fragrant mornings, sanctified their love.

And nights and evenings filled to bursting with their globes of puddled, sweet affections. He would sit clasped in her arms, crying, blubbering with sheer unbounded energy. And she, with mitted hands and dainty, springing leaps would seethe across the fields of silver wheat, in moonlight. True, sometimes leaving him behind but always at last, the embarkation of their love was chastity.

AND of deep Christopher, who nodded in the inning doors and blew great spurts of thick tobacco smoke at any of his patronage who stopped to quest that way. He, noble, base, and stout, demanded free and little tribute for his price as guide Charon levied tutor. Young Evan was his molding and his despair.

However be the ways of world, the lovers brought forth, in time of Spring and true, unstable Dion, a bud to bear their love as mark of tender devotee and passion-free content. He was a clod.

The cycle of the generations ceased in Evan and leaving her alone to bear the trundle of the truckle bed, he hied to mountains, sheds and water places of his dreams.

In one of these he rooted, elbowing in with clusters of the meat and hearty spaces of his fellows.

Thus urban Evan, was born.

THE town itself was tumbling into dust and ashes, and had been left to continue to do so by the pioneers. They picked up, pulling out their fertile watered roots and, lifting had allowed it to crumble back to sod and earth.

For its youth, the town offered only what they desired as infants. They sucked it dry by twelve years and the secondary derelicts, its only trap remaining, trod it closer to the doom of oblivion too slowly.

Like dry, wispy novellas, the German wanderer folk embraced the dirt paths and raised enormous gardenias and carnations and cast lusty eyes at the walnut, oak, and willow trees along the banks of its river, Dreyer.

Evan, thrust into the schoolrooms, allowed the seeping devil-ears of his inheritors to guide and harness the passions; condemned to master him, the masters eked and chipped away at his granite with water-shedding patience. They failed, for he would slip by them, sliding obliquely past their logic and their reason and crawling free to realms they chose to disavow. It was as if a series of doors were being closed by him, behind him as he went, and with each closing door, he escaped a little closer to his cluster, to his parallel world that hovered, dipping down to rescue him in stress.

The pretty dreams he would spin in classes, laid out by his hands in sun and lazy, summer fields and days, would walk and giggle along stream banks and they walked beside him constantly.

BY the suns, the ghoulish townmen planted and slavered at the trees; these beasties, curling down across the valleys. The slender whip of them intrigued Evan, as he slumbered through the little-sensed days of summer. He stood on the bluffs, bone-dry and swept across by lashing, sand-splattered winds. The dusty bushes clung to the flat, rounded bluffs as ugly, squat, green imps clutching some matronly bust. He would follow the river trees as long as his eye could hold them, until dropping off in perspective, his head would nod and rubbing his eyes, he'd shake his fists at the dry land, even as the Indians and their near relation, his pioneers, had done.

For some time, his greatest living dream would be to sit astride a scrubby plains pony, naked and delicious, the sun rumbling in his loins. The exquisite pleasure, symbolized by his brown, firm legs hanging alongside his ponie's warm belly as it stood, nubby and still in the sun. And the bluff, the river, and the trees, were his.

But, those Indian pioneer days and events declined in leather thongs and buckskin, rubbing on his rawness. And the moccasined feet faltered, finally, to a halt.

He was only young, then; he could lie in the river bed, content in the soft grate of the water-washed sand against his legs and the rumble of the creaky combines beyond the trees. He could smell and see the dust, yellow-tan against the green and blue and he could smell the oil as it slithered between the joints and motions of the gears. And hear the friction as it squeeled. And the smell of sweat soaked his tongue, the wet shirts clogging their backs and their armpits dripping in the

hot wind. The yells would float across the water, as he, covered to neck high with tumbling water, heard them click against his ears and shiver, quivering in the air.

HE could imagine then, the sound of trains, and chuffing thunder over the wind-line of trees. And of slave galleys, the bodies rolling and glistening in the oily excretions of the sun, dipping across a war-pond, voices lifted to battle hymns; the voices on the waters did this.

But after all, when the sun had dipped to noon and after, he would swim, lethargically, with lazy, swan-like strokes below the dam, shivering in the sudden, swift cascade of water on his back and flanks.

And so his afternoons should pass, the town collapsed and shuddered with the weight of his spirit as it winged, in flight, across the midnight-Sunday hearths. His dreams could stagger the ice in their hearts; he emerged from town—completed.

THE hoarse, raw raucous shouts collided in his mind, drowning the mind stream he was pursuing. He had just been floating down the Yangtze; the barge was cool and the limpid breezes plucked vapor from the water and flung it, writhing at his silk jacket. He sighed, turning back to the barge, only to be tugged forward into time and space and the sight of four bleared faces peering into his.

"Ho! Hey, Lauderdale!" The voice carried a wet roughness of raw alcohol and Jack, Chambers, and Eff grinned; they stood, arms locked and crossed about each other's shoulders; their shirts were pulled away from the pants and they swayed, leaning heavily toward him.

"Evan, you should have been with us, you should have been with us. We really wrecked 'em, we really smashed 'em—Damn, if we didn't!"

And they moved out, to the fore, to the prestige. He retreated.

He thought, perhaps, the slips and ultimate reversal came about by his sliding scale of universal values. The doors slid closer to each successive boon of leaving. And he grew calmer, he slid the clues of omen, shaving each Orphic symbol to its essence.

The days were mystic—shimmering in sunlight, they filed into this last autumn of his heart. But these very days, successive and never-ending, buoyed him beyond the point of infinite suspension; he clattered through

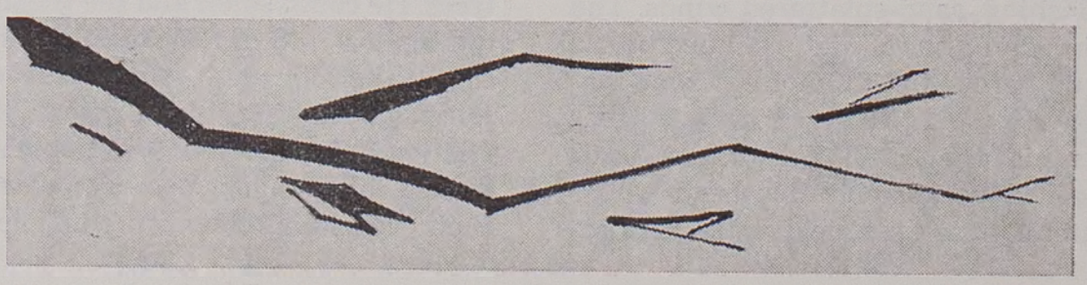
POETRY

The Rip-Tide

Could we but take your hand
and lead you, dripping
down to stand
With us, among the tides and seas
of early fall.

We thought at last
that all the dead
could be together here
but many died aland
and only sea-killed men
are claimed and bedded;
sere is the weed
that drifts in water winds
so slow a stately movement;
go under chests and sunken hulks
that blistered southern seas
with pirate curse.

And steaming, bloodied cutlass;
moans and slipping barefeet
trod a rusted deck,
the neck of any man
is sacred as a silverfish.
The secret wish of little lads
is echoed now,
the blood of whitened bones,
reflects the calcined bow
of mighty ships.



by Barbara Knight

The Splinter Saviour

The figure gaunt,
that staring into the precipice,
undoing me
with tragic christlike eyes,
is hung,
a solitary image
chip of a thousand, thousand boles
and branches
that worshipped still more splendidly
as, tossing, they climbed high
depleting blueness
and the arc.
The hands that clasped a knife
and biting,
thrust it through the wood
to etch a symbol,
stained and torn
by thorns and vicious varnish,
these crafty palms
have shaped the tenets of the faith.
Not molten worship
bounds us
but the artist's emphatic eye.

Jetfire

Just barely arcing,
a pinnacle of mist
soft-formed by steel
into streams
that shriek across the sky,
I, looking, press my hand
and eye
against the form.
Somehow,
the soft-burned image
dissipates
in time.

The phantom scream
of cold steel-blue,
empathies of serrated charm
engulf
the furtive eagle,
darting toward the sun.

them, a little ridiculous, almost a symbol of himself. It was only when he seeped into the human that he sensed such bitterness a-coming and realizing—he fled.

THIS day began with Euclid and his proof. The ergo absented itself from such concise and given demonstrations.

They had just begun to chalk the isosoles triangle upon the board and the lines went shooting off in space, describing boxes, cubes, and circles through the points.

The parallel lines were meeting at their latest, furthest point of parallelism. He watched them, fascinated; and the elements of perspective disintegrated, breaking down into compounds of petered salts. The man and lengths of height and depth reduced to one and then erased.

The snap of the light switch flicked him up from his desk and he went out.

Happy Are the Ignorant

(Continued from page 10)

there was no one at the Presidio intelligent enough to stimulate him in conversation, but who would stay in the dining room for hours on end drinking coffee, talking to whomever would sit at his table and moving to other tables when none chanced to sit at his. There was Ronald F. who, it was discovered, had been a member of the "Abraham Lincoln Brigade" and was eliminated from the school. Everyone was sorry to see him leave and made excuses for his mistake of 1938. I learned that these new friends could be far more tolerant than my friends of old.

THERE was George Edwards who was learning to play the bagpipes in his spare time. Everybody would pretend to be annoyed when he'd practice in the barracks, and occasionally we'd carry him bodily outside and deposit him on the grass with his practice chanter. Actually we were all quite proud of George and his pipes. My new friends had a sense of humor.

There was Feldman, the Jewish boy from Los Angeles, whom everyone teased. We told him we were going to buy a roll of barbed wire and construct a one man concentration camp in order to isolate him from the Christians in the barracks. Feldman knew he belonged and enjoyed the teasing he knew to be without malice. My new friends were understanding.

There were many, many more—Alexander Pavlov who was so completely tri-lingual he could think in Mandarin while conversing in Russian with an American; Hair who sat on his bunk reading the Bible whenever he was up on his studies, and who later, in Korea, traded his Bible for a bottle; Richard C. who bragged of his exploits with the women in Monterey, and who later, in Korea, turned himself in to his C. O. as a homosexual and was sent back to Japan; Thompson the Serbo-Croatin student who was a walking encyclopedia and could correct his instructors after six months of training, but who was frightened to death of guns and had a pistol taken away from him because he was carrying it by the barrel, quite distastefully, like a dead mouse; and Percy Keith who made it extremely difficult for anyone to like him, but who needed people very much.

They were all different and all very real, and I forgot that they were "college trained." Oh, there was talk of Kant, Socrates, Nietzsche, Spinoza, Sophocles, and many others, but it was dished up quite differently than I had once imagined it would be served. These, my new friends, had no answers, but merely sought possible answers. Kant and beer seemed to go well together. Bourbon and Nietzsche complimented one another, and what better place to discuss Socialism than on the beach at Carmel with a gallon of wine towards the end of the month when we couldn't afford Bourbon and Nietzsche? I came to the realization that I had wasted an awful lot of time. I decided, quite by myself, that OCS and Pilot Training would not satisfy me.

ALL my answers were being taken away from me. My peaceful, sensible berth had become something with which I was now totally incompatible. When the year ended, I had no desire to go back to my circumstances of the previous year. When my period of service ended, I had to leave the berth that was no longer sensible. My friends had given me new values but had, unknowingly and without malice, exacted a tremendous price for their gifts. They had taken my concrete plans and confused not only my goals but even the business of simple existence. I am less sure of myself and my ability to cope with the future, but I like my new friends and have no desire to go back to 1950.

The Pig's Christmas

(Continued from page 8)

HE could not feel the snow as he followed, falling and stumbling in the blackness, trying to cry out, but finding himself without voice or strength. After an eternity of falling through the darkness, wrapped in the terror of silence and fear of falling into the lake at the bottom of the valley, he knew he was near the bridge at the edge of the lake. Light came from somewhere through the falling snow, and in it he could see the bell tower and a shape near it.

He ran clumsily around the lake, still trying to call. In the doorway of the bell tower, he saw the old pig looking up at the bell-rope, out of his reach. "Here," he wanted to say, "here!" I can reach it! Stand aside and let me do it! This is too much for you, you are too old and only a pig besides. Let me!" But it all remained choked in his throat, and he could not move his hands to seize the rope.

THE pig tried to reach the rope by standing on his hind legs, trembling with the effort. He shook his head, gathered himself, jumped up and grabbed the rope in his teeth. The rope swung down and the bell rang out loud through the snow. Again the pig jumped and the bell rang again. With the rope in his jaws, he jumped again and again: the sound beat through the village, and in a few moments lights were lit. Torches sputtered in the snow.

Helpless and fascinated, the boy watched the pig move up and down like a flail beating grain. Blood streamed from the pig's mouth, and the torchlight caught bright in his swimming eyes as he watched with head averted the holy procession. The boy was almost suffocated with trying to cry out, and at the moment he felt he could watch no longer, he heard a voice.

It was his friend the beggar, standing in the door of the bell tower. The boy could only see him dimly, and his voice sounded like neither a boy's nor a girl's, a man's nor a woman's. "This is the celebration of the birth," the beggar said. And the boy did not know if he meant the pageant in the grotto or the agony in the bell tower.

The boy heard another sound. The pig shuddered and the rope fell from his torn jaws. Slowly he fell to the floor.

"Now you shall know it," the beggar said and left the doorway. The boy, sobbing, leaped to the bell-rope. Tears streamed down his face; he pulled the rope but could not hear the bell. All he could hear was the uneven breathing of the pig at his feet.

THE torches passed into the village, and his hands fell from the rope. He sank to his knees and took the pig's head in his hands. He shut his eyes, for he was afraid to look at the pig lest he should see him with his front and hind legs stretched out, ready to be slung over a brown shoulder and carried away. "Frank!" he cried, but the breathing grew fainter. "Joseph," he cried in confusion, "Saint Joseph!" He drew back and looked down through his tears. "Father! Christ!"

He wanted to hold back in his hands the life spilling out before his kneeling, wanted

LEAF LACE

BY MARY GERHARDSTEIN

one word
then no more
gone

patterns against a street light
lacy green
green bright with light
filtered through
green lace bright
bright with love
and light
green against black of night
green bright
night black
black

silence sweet with you
above us
soft black night sky
around us
leaves dainty green
a word
and then never
more

Mary, a senior in English, has offered Leaf Lace as her first contribution to Venture. She is from Spokane, Wash.

it more than a golden city or beautiful music heard in the apse.

"This was my Christmas," the pig said so softly that the boy bent closer to hear. "But I saw you help me, so it is yours too. It is even more yours, because you are young, and I am very, very old. It is yours, if you will share it with a pig."

The pig's eyes closed, and the boy, choking, ran his hand over the old head. The head became wood, and the boy looked unbelieving at the prayer railing and his tears that covered it. He looked up from sleep at the candles and gold, alight far down the nave under the choir.

He wiped his tears with his sleeve and got up. He knelt in the aisle, and as he turned saw upon one of the columns a polychromed crucifix, its uplifted agony ignoring the Christmas decorations around it. He saw the face turned aside the swimming eyes looked from the averted face at the candles on the altar.

HE left the church. In front, he saw the friar walking to and fro in meditation, and across the square the bright wagon shone like a wound. But he only glanced at them as he walked away from the village into the hills.

It began to snow.

[The End]